



MITT ROMNEY  
GOVERNOR

KERRY HEALEY  
LT. GOVERNOR

EDWARD A. FLYNN  
SECRETARY

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Public Safety  
Department of Fire Services

P.O. Box 1025 ~ State Road

Stow, Massachusetts 01775

(978) 567~3100 Fax: (978) 567~3121



STEPHEN D. COAN  
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

THOMAS P. LEONARD  
DEPUTY STATE FIRE MARSHAL

For Immediate Release: July 1, 2004  
Contact: Jennifer Mieth  
(978) 567-3381

**Medical, Health and Public Safety Professionals Jointly Urge Citizens to  
*Leave the Fireworks to the Professionals***

“Many people ask me why shouldn’t they let their children play with sparklers?” said State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan. “I ask them if they would give their children a lighter to play with? Sparklers can burn at 1800 F – three times the temperature of a lit match - and hot sparkler wires have ignited clothing, burned bare feet, poked eyes out and started tragic holiday fires.

At a joint press conference today, a diverse group of Massachusetts fire, health, law enforcement, and medical professionals all stood together to urge the people of Massachusetts to ‘leave fireworks to the professionals.’ State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan was joined by Dr. Colleen Ryan, a trauma physician at both Massachusetts General Hospital and the Shriners Burn Hospital, Dr. Bonnie An Henderson, Director of the General Eye Service at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, Dr. Bohdan Pomahac, Associate Director, Burn Unit, Brigham & Women’s Hospital, Erin Christiansen, of the Greater Boston SAFE KIDS Coalition at the Boston Public Health Commission, Westwood Fire Chief William Scoble, vice-president of the Fire Chiefs’ Association of Massachusetts, Hanover Fire Capt. Barbara Stone of the Fire Prevention Association of Massachusetts, State Police Capt. Lt. Frank Moore, Commander, State Police Lt. Martin Foley, head of the Explosive Devices Unit, other State Police officers assigned to the Fire Marshal’s Fire and Explosives Investigation Section, and state fire code enforcement officials. The single goal of this diverse group of fire, health, law enforcement, and medical professionals is to reduce emergency room visits from fireworks injuries.

**Fireworks Cause Thousands of Eye Injuries**

“Each year, fireworks cause approximately 2,000 eye injuries - some of which result in permanent injuries such as blindness,” said Dr. Bonnie An Henderson, Director of the General Eye Service at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. “The majority of people affected are children and young adults. It is important to safeguard against these preventable

tragedies by following simple guidelines: let professionals handle the fireworks, stay at least 500 feet away from any fireworks, and do not handle any unexploded fireworks,” she said.

### **Burn Injuries Take Months to Heal; Leave Scars that Last a Lifetime**

Dr. Colleen Ryan, a trauma physician at both Massachusetts General Hospital and the Shriners Burn Hospital in Boston, said, “A burn injury to a child is a terrible tragedy in a family. It can take weeks, months, or even years of painful surgeries, skin grafts, and post surgical care; and those are just the physical wounds. The emotional scars can last a lifetime.”

### **Fireworks Are Big Business**

“Let’s face it, fireworks is big business in this country and it is hard for our safety message to be heard when millions of dollars are spent on advertising campaigns by national corporations. It’s hard for us to compete with their glitzy direct mail, billboards, Internet sites, and radio ads that entice our citizens into using fireworks,” said Coan. “Sadly, all these dollars lead to devastating injuries to mostly children. Children between the ages of 10 and 14 are most at risk of being injured by fireworks,” said State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan. “It is clear that the ad campaigns are designed to target this age group,” he added.

### **Fireworks Send Nearly 10,000 to Emergency Rooms Each Year**

“Each year in the U.S., thousands of people are treated in emergency rooms as the result of injuries caused by the careless use or malfunction of fireworks. We can help prevent these unnecessary injuries by leaving the fireworks displays to the experts,” said Dr. Bodan Pohamac, a plastic surgeon who is Associate Director of the Burn Unit at Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

### **Half of Fireworks Victims Are Under Age 15**

Erin Christiansen, director of the Greater Boston SAFE KIDS Coalition located at the Boston Public Health Commission said, “Fifty per cent of those treated for fireworks injuries in the U.S. are under the age of 15. The bright, colorful lights of fireworks sparks excitement in children, but they don’t understand the dangers associated with handling them. Because children will imitate what they see grown-ups do, it is important to set a good example and leave the fireworks to the professionals.”

### **4<sup>th</sup> of July No Holiday for Firefighters**

“Traditionally, the Fourth of July has been one of the busiest days of the year for firefighters who, in many communities, provide both emergency medical services as well as fire suppression,” said Hanover Fire Captain Barbara Stone representing the Fire Prevention Association of Massachusetts. “The illegal use of fireworks by amateurs, bon fires, backyard barbecues gone haywire, lawnmowers refueled while the engine is still hot, and overheating cars mean that the Fourth of July is no holiday for firefighters,” she added.

### **Fireworks Caused Over \$1 Million in Losses in Past Decade**

In the past decade we have had 563 major fire and explosions from fireworks, causing 21 civilian injuries, nine fire service injuries, two deaths, and \$1.4 million in property loss – all in a state where consumer fireworks are illegal. A majority of these incidents took place

during the week of the Fourth of July holiday. Over the same period, the state's burn registry has had 64 reports of victims with burns extending over 5% of their body surface area. Of these, two-thirds were people under age 18.

### **Bomb-Making a Concern**

Westwood Fire Chief William Scoble, vice-president of the Fire Chiefs' Association of Massachusetts said, "Not only is the fire service concerned about fireworks causing brush fires and wayward bottle rockets igniting roofs and porches, but we are also concerned with people who use fireworks to make their own 'bigger bangs' or even teens who use fireworks to make bombs."

### **Fireworks Are Illegal Except for Licensed Professionals**

State Police Lt. Martin Foley, Commander of the Hazardous Devices Unit in the Office of the State Fire Marshal said, "The possession and use of all fireworks by private citizens is illegal in Massachusetts. This includes Class C fireworks, which are sometimes falsely called 'safe and sane.' Examples of these are sparklers, party poppers, snappers, firecrackers, and spinners." He noted that the teens involved in the Columbine High School incident in Littleton, Colorado used black powder from class C fireworks to build all of their explosive devices.

### **Illegal to Bring Fireworks into Massachusetts from Out-of-State**

It is illegal to purchase fireworks in another state such as New Hampshire or Connecticut, and to then transport them into Massachusetts. Advertisers cannot be prohibited from advertising fireworks, but it is illegal to purchase fireworks through catalogues or over the Internet for delivery in this state. Many unhappy consumers have lost both their money and fireworks trying to circumvent the law. State Fire Marshal Coan said, "Play it safe and enjoy the many professional, supervised displays across the state this holiday week!"

### **Set A Good Example for Children**

Chief Scoble added, "A few years ago public safety personnel were dumbfounded when we confiscated hundreds of fireworks from a man who stored them under his own child's bed. Not only could they have ignited under the bed from heat, shock or friction, but the temptation to use them must have been enormous for the child."

### **Demonstration of Danger**

Just how lethal fireworks can be, was shown in a startling demonstration conducted by the Department of Fire Services' Hazardous Devices Unit (a.k.a. the State Police bomb squad) at the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Houghton's Pond in the Blue Hills Reservation. Fireworks, typical of those confiscated by law enforcement authorities, were attached to plywood silhouettes of people. The damage done to the plywood forms was shocking as spectators were asked to imagine how much worse the damage would be to a child's body. Plywood is much more durable than the human form. Also shown, was how quickly a sparkler can ignite the sleeve of children's clothing, the damage aerial fireworks such as bottle rockets can do when their flight path encounters a human face and eyes. What can happen when children squirrel fireworks away in their backpack was also shown.

-30-